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Summary

Collaboration between stakeholders to advance sustainable tourism in developing countries is an under researched, but vital topic. This study was conducted to understand multi-stakeholder collaboration for sustainable tourism development in Ethiopia, including the perceptions and initiatives of governments, tourism operators, and local communities. It is hoped that this research will fill the gap in our understanding of this topic and contribute towards cooperation to advance the economic, socio-cultural, and environmental sustainability of tourism in Ethiopia.

Ethiopia is the most populous landlocked country in the world, as well as the second-most populous nation on the African continent, with a population of 102.4million. It is home to over 80 ethno-linguistic groups, each with its own built heritage, cultural space, and distinct living expressions and practices (UNESCO 2015). In addition, Ethiopia has some unique natural tourist attractions, including national parks with endemic wildlife and the Danakil Depression, which is one of the lowest points on Earth at 160 metres below sea level, as well as one of the hottest places with temperatures exceeding 60°C (MoCT 2017). Nine of Ethiopia's attractions are World Heritage listed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Until recently, the country does not appear to have benefited from tourism, although the government and local communities are now focusing on how to maximise these benefits. However, if it is not properly managed to minimise negative environmental and cultural effects, tourism could become a polluter of the environment and result in the unfair distribution of benefits (Choi and Sirakaya 2005). Minimisation of the negative effects of tourism and maximisation of its potential benefit calls for the support of stakeholders (Brown 2004; Choi and Sirakaya 2005). Collaboration among tourism stakeholders is vital to the sustainable development of tourism. Although many studies have been carried out on this topic (Jamal and Getz 1995; McComb, Boyd, and Boluk 2017; Waligo, Clarke, and Hawkins 2013), most of them do not appear to have linked stakeholder collaboration with sustainable tourism. The balance of discussion is weighted towards either stakeholder collaboration or sustainable tourism. Against this background, this research aims to analyse multi-stakeholder collaboration and its influence on stakeholders' perceptions of sustainable tourism in Ethiopia.

In order to arrive at a better understanding of stakeholders' perceptions of sustainable tourism, four different destinations – Addis Ababa, Awash National Park, Bishoftu, and Gondar –were selected for this study, as representative of the economic, socio-cultural, and environmental elements of sustainable tourism in Ethiopia. The analysis was guided by specific issues related to the stage of collaboration among stakeholders, the factors influencing multi-stakeholder collaboration, and the stakeholders' perceptions of sustainable tourism. In order to fulfil the objectives of this research, a qualitative multiple case study approach was used. Multiple stakeholders, drawn from the public sector (central government and regional government offices), private sector (tour companies and accommodation providers), and grassroots community (including local residents found at the destination), were involved.

Thematic analysis of the stage of stakeholder collaboration was performed based on the theory of stakeholder collaboration (Graci 2013; Gray 1985; Selin and Chevez1995a). The theory of stakeholder collaboration describes collaboration as an emergent process emanating from certain conditions, such as observable environmental problems and an already existing association or proactive leader that takes the initiative to trigger collaboration. After this initiation, collaboration progresses to problem identification, the stage at which legitimate stakeholders are identified and the domain-level problem or issue is determined. This stage leads to the direction setting stage, in which the stakeholders articulate the domain-level problem and set a common vision and direction to guide them. Based on the nature of the domain-level problem and the willingness of stakeholders, collaboration moves to the fourth stage: structuring. At the structuring stage, the relationship among the stakeholders is formalised and institutionalised, in order to facilitate monitoring and any follow-up activities. In addition, roles and responsibilities are clarified by the stakeholders. At the fifth stage, the success of the collaboration is assessed in terms of its outcomes.

Analysis of the stage of collaboration reveals that collaboration among Ethiopian tourism stakeholders appears to have advanced to a high level, evidenced by the existence of certain formal institutions (e.g., the Ethiopian Tourism Organization). However, the actual relationship among stakeholders seems to be at the initial stage, as stakeholders do not seem to have identified each other as legitimate stakeholders and have not developed a common vision or consensus about the reason for their collaboration. Therefore, it was not possible in this study to

describe the stage of collaboration among the stakeholders in a sequential manner, as framed by the theory of collaboration.

The study then looked at the factors influencing stakeholder collaboration. The influence of these factors was explained using the social exchange theory (Blau 1964; Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005; Emerson 1976). Power, which is described as a stakeholder's capacity to influence decisions, the geographic location of the stakeholder, and the level of support the stakeholder receives from the government, as well as the economic capacity of the stakeholder, were found to influence the stakeholder's willingness to collaborate with other actors in the tourism system.

The outcome of the collaboration, which constitutes the fifth stage of collaboration, was investigated in terms of stakeholders' perceptions of sustainable tourism. The study found that most of the stakeholders in the case study destinations had not reflected on 'sustainable tourism', in terms of its economic, socio-cultural, and environmental elements. The perceptions of stakeholders related more to the particular tourism resource that they are exposed to and the position that they assume they have. For example, in terms of its position, the government understands sustainable tourism in terms of the contribution of tourism to the main development goal of the country, i.e., poverty alleviation, while private sector stakeholders focus on the economic benefits of tourism in terms of generating foreign exchange and lengthening the stay of tourists. Only the community at the tourism destination understood sustainable tourism in terms of the conservation of resources (environmental sustainability). Those community members located near cultural heritage sites also relate the sustainability of tourism to the conservation of their cultural heritage (socio-cultural sustainability) and receiving benefits from the resources (economic sustainability). Community members located near a park tend to associate sustainability with the conservation of the park (environmental sustainability) and the sharing of benefits gained from the park (economic sustainability).

Based on these results, it can be concluded that the top-down approach to tourism management in Ethiopia has influenced the nature of collaboration among stakeholders. In other words, the top-down approach in which directives are imposed on stakeholders has apparently created reluctance (ignorance) at the grassroots level and resulted in a difference in the perception of sustainable tourism by the government (top) and those at the grassroots. As a result, tourism stakeholders tend to view sustainable tourism based on their individual interests, instead of

promoting it as a common agenda for the common good. In relation to the elements of sustainable tourism, it appears that the economic aspect of tourism dominates, over the conservation of cultural and environmental resources. This finding is similar to the findings of other studies in developing countries where the economic focus dominates the other elements of sustainable tourism (Kim 2013).

As this study is based on case studies, the findings cannot be generalised to other destinations. However, the findings may provide insights for researchers, policy makers, and tourism stakeholders and indicate areas for further research. A potential area for future research is the factors influencing stakeholder collaboration in developing countries and how to mitigate the problems that arise.

Despite its limitations, the findings of this study contribute to filling the research gap on the link between stakeholder collaboration and stakeholders' perceptions of sustainable tourism. It identifies the factors influencing stakeholder collaboration, which sheds light on how stakeholder collaboration influences stakeholders' perceptions about the elements of sustainable tourism. In addition, this research provides insights for policy makers on the importance of stakeholder engagement in policy making and implementation. The identified factors influencing collaboration also inform policy makers on how to mitigate the problems faced in collaboration and move towards the sustainable development of tourism.